

Praying with or without Shoes

A Brief Insight on Salāt Etiquette and Cleanliness

By Husain Inuwa Maitakari

In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

I thank Allah for granting me the wisdom and opportunity to write this brief but concise explanation. I felt compelled to share it with my Muslim brothers, as this topic often leads to arguments, misunderstandings, and even disputes—especially among students of knowledge.

This note is a product of insights gained during our weekly "Majlis" (circle of knowledge) held at Alfurqan Juma' at Mosque, Alu Avenue, Nassarawa, Kano somewhere around 2022.

The lecture thoroughly examined both the literal and Sharī'ah perspectives of the ḥadīth that allows praying while wearing shoes. Though the ḥadīth is authentic and considered mustaḥabb (recommended) by many scholars, it remains a source of debate, particularly among contemporary students of knowledge.

Many companions (Ṣaḥābah) of the Prophet ﷺ used to pray in their shoes during and after his lifetime. It was even seen as unusual for someone to pray barefoot at that time because the Prophet ﷺ instructed his companions to differ from the Jews, who used to pray barefoot. Hence, praying in shoes—provided they are free of filth—is considered mustaḥabb.

On one occasion, the Prophet ﷺ removed his shoes during prayer. When a companion beside him did the same, the Prophet ﷺ asked why he had done so. The companion replied, “Because I saw you remove yours.” The Prophet ﷺ then informed him that Jibrīl (the Archangel Gabriel) had informed him that there was filth on his shoes, so he removed them immediately.

Similarly, ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd once saw a man praying barefoot and questioned his style of prayer, asking if it was an “Iraqi style” —implying disapproval.

Changing Circumstances and Contemporary Practice

In today’ s society, with technological advancement and social changes, the practice of praying with shoes has declined. Mosques are now decorated with fine tiles, carpets, and marble, making it impractical to allow shoes inside.

In Islamic jurisprudence (Sharī‘ah), there’ s a principle: Dar’ al-mafāsid muqaddam ‘alā jalb al-maṣāliḥ (Preventing harm takes precedence over acquiring benefits).

This principle supports the idea that maintaining cleanliness in mosques—something obligatory—is more critical than performing a recommended act like praying in shoes.

Verses from the Qur'an

"Only those shall maintain Allah's mosques who believe in Allah and the Last Day, establish prayer, give zakāt, and fear none but Allah. It is they who are expected to be on true guidance." (Surah At-Tawbah, 9:18)

"And the mosques are for Allah (alone)." (Surah Al-Jinn, 72:18)

"In houses (mosques), which Allah has ordered to be raised, His Name is glorified in them morning and evening." (Surah An-Nūr, 24:36)

These verses emphasize two responsibilities:

- To raise and maintain the mosque with honor and cleanliness.
- To worship Allah within it—through prayer, Qur'an recitation, I'tikāf, and learning.

The Prophet's Emphasis on Cleanliness

The Prophet ﷺ praised a woman who used to clean the mosque. When she died, he prayed over her grave, showing the great importance he placed on maintaining the mosque's cleanliness.

Conclusion

Praying with shoes is a recommended Sunnah that was practiced during the Prophet's ﷺ time and the era of the Tābi'ūn. The Prophet ﷺ also encouraged this practice to differ from the Jews.

However, in contemporary times, enforcing this Sunnah is impractical due to the potential harm—namely, mosque contamination and resulting aversion among the Muslim community. And in Islamic legal principles, removing harm takes priority over acquiring benefit.

Wallāhu A‘lam (Allah knows best).

Husain Inuwa
usainiskima@gmail.com
+2349042152353